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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7559  
INFO RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1171  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4715  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8259  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5821  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1583  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1588  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 000356

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO  
PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/11/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)  
SUBJECT: REFERENDUM PROCEEDS AS SCHEDULED

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Classified By: Poloff Chelsia Wheeler for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. The GOB went ahead with its referendum on May 10 in the areas of the country that were not affected by Cyclone Nargis. On a diplomatic tour, two Embassy officers visited eight polling stations in two cities, Myeik and Kyaingtone. We did not see any significant disturbances, but did observe several instances of voting irregularities and mismanagement. Reports from other areas indicated that the voting process was even less fair: some voters were given ballots that had previously been completed, and others were carefully watched as they voted. Our Ministry of Foreign Affairs liaisons, indicated in private that the advance ballots were not secret; and these ballots constituted approximately one third of all ballots cast. In the five vote counts our officers observed, turnout was high, as was the percentage of "yes" votes recorded. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On May 9 to 11, Embassy officers traveled to Myeik in Tanintharyi Division and Kyaingtone, Shan State on Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) sponsored tours to observe the May 10 referendum. A total of 18 such tours were organized throughout the country, covering each of the fourteen states and divisions. Most tours were very small, with just one or two diplomats on each.

#### The Voting Process

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¶3. (SBU) The polling stations Poloffs visited followed a common theme, in line with the layout prescribed by the elections committee. Citizens first used their identity cards to register at registration booths, which were located just outside the areas designated for polling. Voters received a ballot signed by the station chief, and then proceeded to makeshift cubicles, walled on three sides with a curtain covering the entrance, to mark their ballot. Voters then carried their marked ballot back into the central room to cast their vote. Ballot boxes were made of white cardboard or wood and sealed with tape or nailed shut. Finally, voters exited the central polling area through a separate door.

¶4. (SBU) Many individuals were involved in the voting

process and several of them wore uniforms. In some polling stations, a policeman monitored the voter registration tables. Civil servants, school teachers, or volunteers manned the voter registration tables. Inside the central polling room several uniformed officials from the fire department were stationed, monitoring voters as they placed their ballots in the ballot box. Eight to ten individuals, referred to as "responsible persons" were present both in the central polling area and at the registration tables, ostensibly to direct voters to the various stations and explain how to vote to the uninitiated. An official explained to Poloff that the requirements to be a "responsible person" were that an individual must "be respected in the community, 18 years old, and have a clear criminal record". Notably, these are the same requirements for membership in the USDA, the junta's thuggish civilian organization.

#### BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING

15. (SBU) Poloffs noted referendum officials and police Special Branch (SB) personnel with handheld radios outside four of the polling stations we visited. At other polling places, referendum officials photographed and videotaped voters. When the polling began, Poloffs were stationed inside the central voting area along with a phalanx of photographers. These cameramen came from the Ministry of Information, local junta ward committees, state television and other sources. Alarminglly, one individual whom Poloff identified as a member of SB persistently took photographs of voters' faces as they cast their ballots. Photographers were generally allowed free range of the central polling area. In one instance, Poloff and the CDA from Pakistan witnessed a

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fire department official enter the curtained voting booth along with a voter.

#### Counting the Votes, Properly or Not

16. (SBU) As promised, the votes were counted in front of ten witnesses, although it was unclear who had produced the witnesses. (Note: In some instances, the polling stations we saw closed over 30 minutes early.) In Myeik, the witnesses were all women, mostly very young, who had waited at the polling station the entire day. They were not, however, the same people who signed the form to validate the vote counting: those signatures were from men who were present at the station but did not act as witnesses. In Kyaingtone, one polling station appeared to have a random selection of witnesses who actually observed the counting, while another had all male witnesses who were required to stand away from the counting and could not actually see the ballots.

17. (SBU) There were variations in validating ballots. In all cases, as ballots were being counted, a referendum official oversaw the counting. When a question arose about a vote, the referendum official was consulted. Several questionable ballots were counted as Yes votes. Ballots marked with a signature, flat horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines, doodles, circles and zigzags were all counted as Yes votes. Poloff saw one vote marked with an X and the word "NO" counted as invalid. Vote decisions contradicted themselves as well. In one case, a ballot marked with a signature was counted as a Yes vote, another was marked as a No vote. In another, Poloff witnessed ballot counters accept a single wad of five "Yes" ballots that were marked in the same hand, with the same pen, and appeared to be cast by the same person.

18. (C) The counted votes were separated into three piles: yes, no, and invalid. Officials drew a large line through all unused ballots to invalidate them for future use. They placed counted ballots into labeled envelopes, which they sealed. Many of the stations, however, did not have the

proper sealing supplies, and some resorted to sealing the ballot bags by melting plastic over the opening with a lighter. Others had string and sealing wax, which Thiha Han, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Liaison in Myeik, explained is the same method they use to transport their diplomatic pouch, and it is therefore considered secure. According to one local election commissioner, the bags of sealed ballots were then sent to an archive although he could not say where.

¶9. (SBU) Elections officials used a pre-printed form to report the tallies of votes to higher levels. At our request, they showed us the form, which explained the number of total eligible voters in the district, how many advance ballots were cast, and how many people voted on the day of the referendum. The forms were signed by five witnesses (who were not the same as those that had actually witnessed the counting), and five elections officials.

#### Tallies of the Votes

¶10. (C) In the five polling stations where we observed the vote counting, there was an average approval rate of 85.6 percent among the voters. However, these polling stations were all informed in advance that they would have diplomatic observers, and they represent a very small sample of the number of stations in each city. For example, according to the government, in Myeik there were a total of 781 polling stations, but we only saw two. Workers from Pyi Phyo Tun Factory outside of Myeik approved the constitution at a rate of 96.7, because "they work for the factory and therefore like government policy," Township Peace and Development Council Chairman U Kaun San explained. MFA Liaison Thiha Han (protect), on the other hand, observed privately that "it was a number that would make the DPRK proud."

Polling Station	Yes	No	Invalid	Percent Support
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Pyi Phyo Tun Factory	880	5	25	96.7
Myeik 1	466	151	12	74
Myeik 2	907	382	15	69.5
Kyaingtone	1504	136	32	89.9
Yang Lu Village	2644	22	29	98.1
Total	6401	696	113	85.6

¶11. (C) While only four percent of voters cast advance ballots in polling stations we observed in Shan State, over one-third had cast advance ballots in Myeik. These ballots consisted of two pieces of paper, one containing the voter's name and contact information, and the other containing the vote. Thiha Han explained that in theory these pieces of paper should be separated. However, he quietly noted that there was immense pressure when casting advanced ballots to keep them together, thus eliminating any privacy in this voting process. When he voted, the official allowed him to vote privately, but included his name with his vote. All GOB employees were required to cast their ballots this way, from MFA officials to teachers.

#### Reports from Our Contacts

¶12. (C) Embassy contacts reported a much different story from what we saw on our MFA-sponsored tour. Reports from Chin State, Magwe Division, and Shan State indicated that many voters were given ballots that had already been pre-voted in favor of the constitution. Others reported that officials would come to their home and ask one family member to fill out the ballots for everyone else. One small grantee reported that in his hometown, he personally knew 100 people who had voted against the constitution, but when the numbers

were tallied, the government announced that only four people in the area had voted against it. Many people from throughout the country reported that polls closed several hours early and officials cast their ballots on their behalf.

Factory workers in Mandalay were required to wear T-shirts that supported the constitution when they went to the polls.

¶13. (C) Comment. On our MFA-sponsored tour, we observed only a few polling stations under very closely controlled conditions. Still we clearly observed instances of mismanagement and voting irregularities, including intimidation. We were not surprised, since the process running up to the referendum had been so flawed. Voters were not informed of their options in advance, had little or no access to the constitution they were supposed to approve, were not allowed to gather freely to debate the pros and cons, were prohibited from campaigning against it, and received numerous visits from officials pressuring for a positive vote and threatening retaliation for no votes. In these circumstances, no one should be surprised if the regime announces the constitution has been approved, but no one should consider the process free, fair or credible. End Comment.

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